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THE ALIENATION

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OF THE

EDUCATED CLASS FROM POLITICS.

An Oration

BEFORE THE

PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY AT CAMBRIDGE,  
JUNE 29, 1876.

BY

J. L. DIMAN.

PROVIDENCE:  
SIDNEY S. RIDER.

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## ORATION.

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You ask me to address you at a time which hardly allows the usual license in the selection of a theme. Gathering, as we do, to this annual festival on the eve of the great secular commemoration which rivets all regards to the issues of an unexampled experiment, I should justly forfeit your sympathy were I rash enough to divert your thoughts from those imperious public concerns which mingle so much of pride and fear with their far-reaching problems. Even when meeting as associates of an academical fraternity, we cannot forget that we are constituents of a larger society,—partners in a fellowship more comprehensive than any specific calling or profession,—members incorporate into that spacious and supreme commonwealth, without whose wholesome restraints and benign supervision all bonds would be relaxed, all intellectual progress would falter, and all highest aims which we here cherish fail of accomplishment. Least of all can we be unmindful of such weightier concerns when assembled, for the first time, under the shadow of these walls,—these walls that have been reared in recognition of the sacrifice made by scholars on the common altar, which, long as they stand, will attest the alliance of generous culture and unselfish public spirit,

and whose very stones would cry out should the sons of this illustrious mother ever grow heedless of the lessons here inculcated.

Is the culture which proved itself so equal to the strenuous calls of war less able to cope with the strain of civil life? Is that educated class which you represent coming to be a less efficient force in our national experiment? Are our intellectual and our political activities doomed to pursue two constantly diverging paths, our ideal aims ceasing to qualify and shape our practical endeavors? These are among the questions which force themselves upon us at a time like this. The solicitude which they awaken is shown in the humiliating contrasts so freely drawn between the public men of the present day and those of an earlier period; in the frequent discussion of the sphere of the scholar in politics, and in the approbation so heartily expressed when men of exceptional training have been selected to fill important public stations. If this conviction that the breach between Politics and Culture is widening be well grounded, it is a capital arraignment of American society, — the one result that would stamp our republican experiment with failure. Does our political system exclude from public recognition those superior interests which enlist the most enthusiastic coöperation of generous minds, or does it tend to strip of legitimate influence those best fitted to wrestle with worthy issues? Whichever the cause, the result would be equally disastrous. Should such a deplorable divorce become established, our culture would be cut off from healthful contact with living interests, and our politics be robbed of pure and ennobling inspiration; our scholars would sink to

pedants and our statesmen to politicians. The merit of such a polity as ours cannot be measured by the success with which it meets the common ends of government. However effective it may have proved in promoting material prosperity, or a wholesome dispersion of political power, if it does not at the same time hold in happy adjustment the highest instincts and the positive governing forces of the nation, it cannot claim to be truly representative, nor long elicit that prompt allegiance of reason and conscience on which all genuine representative institutions must ultimately rest. Not extent of territory, nor multiplication of material resources, but a noble and sympathetic public life is the gauge of national greatness. "The excellencie and perfection of a commonweale," to borrow the words of Bodin, "are not to be measured by the largeness of the bounds thereof, but by the bounds of virtue itself." All famous states have been informed with ideal forces. No dazzling spread of material products at Philadelphia may console us, if, throughout that varied show, we are haunted with the conviction that what gives meaning and grace and admirableness to national success is losing its sway over us. Though this great Leviathan, whose completed century we celebrate, be indeed hugest of all commonwealths that have breasted the flood of time, its vast bulk will only stand revealed as more ugly, more clumsy, more preposterous, if it simply drift on the sleepy drench of private, selfish interests and sordid cares.

In discussing this question let us not forget the wider meaning with which the phrase "educated class" has become invested. With men of exceptional

eminence in the selecter walks of literature and science we are not concerned. That absorbing devotion to a pursuit by which alone its supreme prizes are purchased, carries with it, in most cases, a corresponding sacrifice of aptitude for other callings; and the familiar instances in which some of our foremost men of letters have entered with success the political arena must be reckoned as brilliant exceptions to the rule. The habits of the study are not the best discipline for affairs, however true the maxim of Bacon, that no kind of men love business for itself but those that are learned. Experience has shown that the intellectual qualities which insure success in the discovery of truth are rarely combined with the qualities which lend these truths their greatest practical efficiency. The service which original genius renders society in other ways far more than compensate for any injury which its renunciation of ordinary duties may involve. The world lost nothing by leaving Adam Smith in a professor's chair, and gained nothing by giving La Place a minister's portfolio. By the term "educated class," I have in mind that much larger number who form the mediating term between the intellectual leaders of the community and the great majority; the interpreters and expounders of principles which others have explored; the liberal connection, so adequately represented here to-day, not of the learned professions only, but of men generously inured, by the discipline of such an ancient university as this, to just opinions, and sincere speech, and independent action; whose scholarship is the gracious apparel of well-compacted character. In this wider sense, while the phrase implies educated intellect and educated taste, it implies

even more, educated judgment and educated conscience, those sovereign qualities which are usurped by no single calling, but belong to man as man, — to man in the most beneficent play of his faculties, in the ripest growth of his reason, and in the widest scope of his influence. This is the class through whom the impulses of sound culture are disseminated, and whose alienation from public interests is a sign of such evil portent on our political horizon.

In our own case this lessening interest of the educated class in politics is more significant when we recall the fact that politics once disputed with theology the sway over the most vigorous thought among us. Without doubt this modification may be traced, in part, to the operation of general social causes; but I can by no means consent to their opinion who would find its main explanation here. That the interests of society are far more diversified to-day than a century ago, that the speculative problems pressing for solution are vastly more numerous and complex, that the most adventuresome and prolific intellectual energy of our time no longer expends itself on those questions which in former ages exercised such potent fascination, no man will deny; yet this spurring of mental activity in new directions need not have caused its zeal to flag in the old. Is it not the prerogative of all genuine impulse to quicken a common movement? Does not success in one field rouse to new effort in every other? I would not include in this the wild pursuit of wealth, the vulgar materialism, of which in recent years we have had such shocking examples, and within whose poisoned circle all generous aspiration withers; the rivalry which I am here discussing



is the rivalry of intellectual forces. Can social progress, in this sense, involve any such result as is here alleged? Can there be any real antagonism between the study of nature and the study of man; between investigations of the laws printed on the heavens and the laws by which society advances and great and durable states are built up? When science, ceasing to speak as a child, published through Newton decrees that claimed obedience beyond the flaming walls of space, did it chill the interest of Locke in those inquiries which scattered such prolific seeds in the soil of this new world? The last century was in France an epoch of prodigious scientific movement; but in what period were social and political problems ever more keenly debated? The country that made its boast of a Buffon and a Lavoisier, could point not less to a Montesquieu and a Turgot. Nay, in the same person the two tendencies were sometimes seen combined, and the precocious genius of Condorcet was busied equally with the differential calculus, and with the foundations of human society. After reaching almost the highest distinction as a mathematician, he declared, "that for thirty years he had hardly passed a day without meditating on the political sciences." If, therefore, our educated class has lost the interest it once felt for political problems, this result must be ascribed to something else than our stimulated zeal for physical studies. And if we can no longer say with Algernon Sydney, that political questions "so far concern all mankind, that besides the influence on our future life they may be said to comprehend all that in this world deserves to be cared for," they certainly have not lost their importance as the great issues of modern society are more distinctly revealed.

The proposition has not lacked vigorous support with a brilliant class of English writers, who shrink appalled from a political tendency which they can see no way of successfully resisting, that the popular movement of modern times, resting as it does on the postulate that all men should be equal so far as the laws can make them so, reduces the individual to impotence by making him a hopelessly feeble unit in the presence of an overwhelming majority. In such a plight it is mere mockery, we are told, to exhort men of superior parts to exercise an independent influence. The wise and the good stand on a level with the foolish and the bad, and to hope that reason will rule in the ordering of affairs when each one is provided with a vote and may cast it as he likes, is an idle dream. This argument does not apply, of course, to our own experiment alone, but is directed against a tendency which in all societies that claim to be civilized is setting forward with accelerated force. It seems enough to say, in answer, that we are not now in a position to analyze with accuracy a movement of such tremendous import. Modern democracy is too recent a phenomenon to admit of any estimate as yet of the complex range of its social and political and intellectual consequences. It is on the dead, not on the living, that the coroner holds his inquest. Ancient society was comparatively simple; its phenomena for the most part admit of obvious explanation; its completed history allows us to pass a confident judgment upon it as a whole. Mediæval society, if less simple, still turned, in its chief phases, on few points; even feudalism, once so perplexed a study, has yielded to recent analysis, and when it arose, how

it affected the classes included in its range, why it came to an end, are questions about which scholars are ceasing to dispute. But that great popular movement, which is now so clearly seen to have thrust its strong roots down into the Middle Age, is still in process ; we ourselves are but parts of it ; the terms of the mighty equation are not yet written out. It is pleasant to fancy that we stand secure on the rocks and gaze at the mighty rush of the waters, —

“ E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem,”

but it is fancy and nothing more. In the flood of phenomena all perspective is blurred, and relations of cause and effect are hopelessly mixed. We are in danger of joining what has only a seeming connection, and of attributing to one class of causes consequences that are due wholly to another. No country ever had a more genial and appreciative critic of its institutions than we had in the accomplished Frenchman who attempted the first philosophical estimate of American Democracy, but how crude and ludicrous even, in the light of our later experience, seem some of De Tocqueville's most elaborate judgments. Has American Democracy, we may well ask, proved unequal to the task of levying taxes, or of raising armies ? De Tocqueville was impressed, as others who have come among us have been impressed, with the lack of conspicuous ability among our public men ; but to argue that democratic institutions are unfavorable to the development of the highest individual excellence, because men of moderate parts are most commonly selected for public offices, implies a misunderstanding of the meaning and function of government

in a democratic state. When it is so confidently argued that the theory of political equality must result in mediocrity, because it holds out fewer prizes to exceptional superiority in the public service, it should be remembered that in other ways it multiplies the incitements to effort. And even conceding that the removal of political restrictions can add nothing to the intrinsic force of individual character, it by no means follows that such removal presents any bar to the full and varied development of existing forces.

Is it not time to have done with what the latest historian of England terms "this silly talk about Democracy." Democratic institutions are on trial; so is modern society itself; it is quite too soon to bring in the verdict. Of all the reproaches hurled against the popular tendency of modern times, the most ill-grounded, surely, is the dismal cry about the tyranny of the majority. This is one of the especial dangers on which De Tocqueville dwells; and later writers, borrowing the hint from him, are never weary of repeating that, overawed and intimidated by the opinion of the unthinking mass, all expression of individual sentiment is stifled, and the intelligent and thoughtful few are deterred from attempting to wield the influence which they ought to exercise. But if in a community where law authorizes and protects the expression of opinion, any individual is restrained by prudential considerations from promulgating what his reason recognizes as true, or his conscience affirms as right, the true explanation must be sought, not in any tyranny of the majority, but rather in the lack of that "intrinsic force" on which Leslie Stephen so vigorously insists. Every fuller soul, elected in the

great crises of history, to lead the forlorn hope of the race, has been in a minority; nay, the captain in the most marvellous revolution the world has seen was in a minority of one. Earnest, aggressive, self-forgetful minorities have been, in every age, the conditions of social progress; against them the tyranny of the majority has always been ruthlessly exercised; exercised by arbitrary power, — under the forms of law, — with the sanction of religion; exercised with the sword, the faggot, and the rack; and instead of wielding with us an aggravated rule, never has the power of the majority been subject, in so many ways, to checks and bounds as under the institutions which an English Lord Chancellor has described as the very greatest refinement of polity to which any age has ever given birth. And never too, it may be truly said, has the will of the minority been more outspoken than with us. The crowning event in our hundred years of history, the turning point in our great struggle for national integrity, was the result of a public sentiment, created, shaped, carried to its triumphant issue by a persistent and resolute minority!

“For Gods delight in gods,  
And thrust the weak aside.”

An explanation of the abstinence of our educated class from politics, more nearly connected with our distinctive polity, has been discovered by Mr. Bagehot, in the difference between a cabinet and a presidential system. To this difference, he claims, must also be attributed the lack of any public opinion in America finished and chastened like that of England. With the English, attention to politics means a real direction of affairs, the nation making itself felt with

effective force at the determining crisis of party conflicts. Whether the ministry shall go out or remain in, is decided by a parliamentary division, and on this decision public opinion outside of Parliament, the secret, pervading disposition of society, exercises a potent influence. The nation is stirred to the expression of an opinion, because it realizes that its opinion is decisive. The sympathy remains at all times close and vital between public sentiment and the actual governing power. But with ourselves precisely the reverse of this obtains. Save in the instant of exercising the elective franchise, the nation has no decisive influence; in that supreme effort its vital forces are exhausted, and it must wait an appointed time until its periodic function is restored. Hence it is not incited to keep its judgment fresh; nor is its opinion disciplined by continuous exercise. Our congressional disputes are "prologues without a play"; they involve no catastrophe; the prize of power is not a legislative gift. As a natural result men of mark are not strongly tempted to secure seats in a deliberative body when they have only power to make a speech, when they are neither stimulated by prospect of influence nor chastened by dread of responsibility. And when public opinion itself is not subject to constant modification, those who shape public opinion are deprived of the most positive incitement to effort. The results are too distant and uncertain.

To much of this reasoning it is enough to say, that while the term of office of the administration is fixed by law, and so far our system is open to the reproach of being inelastic, yet the term is so brief that the nation hardly recovers from the excitement of one

presidential election before it is plunged into another ; that the choice of the chief magistrate is only one of numberless ways in which the elective franchise is exercised ; that congressional debates, if they have not the effect, on the instant, to change the administration, do have a direct and often a controlling influence upon its policy ; and that the national legislature, so far from being unaffected by public opinion out of doors, is often controlled by it to a deplorable extent. That in the agony of a great ministerial crisis, a parliamentary debate fixes public attention, as it cannot be fixed by a speech in Congress, must be conceded ; but that such an eager strife for power and place, disciplines and instructs public opinion any more effectually than our more rigid method is an assertion that seems destitute of all sound support. And still less am I disposed to admit that the participation of our educated class in politics would be sensibly promoted by the removal of the strongly accented distinction between the executive and the legislative branch, which constitutes so cardinal a feature of our constitution, and by making the tenure of the highest administrative office directly dependent on the will of a congressional majority. English experience does not warrant the expectation that public life would be rendered more attractive to men of nice moral instincts ; and while the immediate prospect of great place, without doubt, supplies a most powerful stimulus to effort, it can yet, under ordinary conditions, address itself to only a limited class. The great body of educated men must be inspired by a worthier motive.

While, however, I cannot concede to Mr. Bagehot that the chief explanation of the alienation of our

educated men from politics is to be found in the mere mode of administration, I think it must be admitted that there are certain features of our system which have tended, in no small degree, to weaken the hold of public interests upon some of the more earnest and disinterested of this class. Our system is one of carefully limited powers, from which is excluded the larger share of those questions which appeal to the deepest convictions of mankind. It sprang from political needs, and was carefully fashioned to compass certain definite and practical aims. But since that day when the conquering Franks conferred temporal dominion on the successor of the fisherman, the questions which have allured the most generous and enthusiastic spirits to the field of politics have grown out of the disputed relations of the temporal and spiritual powers. These commanding problems for a time turned Dante from poetry and Occam from theology ; and if, in the press of modern interests, they have ceased to reign supreme, they have still given to modern European politics most of its noblest impulses. They have provoked the most profound inquiries, the most disinterested effort, the most unselfish surrender to magnanimous, if not seldom mistaken and impracticable ends. They have drawn into the heated arena of politics not a few whom only the most sacred allegiance to ideal principle could have tempted to a public career. On the other hand, our politics, for the past hundred years, have been bereft of these ennobling impulses, and political life, of necessity, has lost no small part of the attraction which it has furnished, in other lands, to the purest, most earnest, most cultivated minds. It has not, for example,



been within the scope of our American institutions to produce such a man as the late Count Montalembert, coupling the courage and address of a great orator with the religious enthusiasm of a monk, delighting to look at politics as primarily the means of realizing spiritual results, a genuine *fils des croisés* amid the fierce debates of the French Assembly; nor such a man as Gladstone, faulty perhaps as a mere party leader, but treading with no unequal step after Pitt and Peel as a parliamentary debater, and surpassing both in the comprehensiveness of his range and the earnestness of his moral conviction, habitually looking at politics in the light of man's largest relations as an immortal being, disowned by Oxford when most truly faithful to Oxford's earliest traditions. That memorable measure which taxed his distinctive capabilities as an original legislator, and elicited the most transcendent exhibition of his oratory, was a problem with which no American statesman could be called to deal. And who supposes, for a moment, that the ordinary discipline which a public career with us supplies would qualify one of our party leaders, after laying down the cares of office, to discuss, as Mr. Gladstone has recently discussed, the questions to which the novel assumptions of the Vatican have given such added significance. If the separation of church and state that obtains with us has helped religion, it has certainly narrowed the range and weakened the motive of political action.

But not only was our government established as one of expressly limited powers; very soon after it went into operation a political thesis came to be generally accepted which gave this principle a wider and

more pernicious application. At the beginning of the present century the maxim was eagerly accepted and enforced, that the functions of government, in general, ought to be confined within the narrowest limits, and directed only to the most utilitarian ends. Since the adoption of our federal constitution two distinct political tendencies have shown themselves among us, — two tendencies radically distinct in origin and spirit, yet singularly tending to the same result. One was a strong infusion of the politics of sentiment, borrowed from Rousseau by Mr. Jefferson, coloring our famous Declaration, and proving itself through all our history by a passion for abstract maxims of equality and liberty, by a somewhat ill-regulated zeal in promoting whatever schemes of social and political reform, and by an indiscriminating sympathy with revolutionary movements throughout the world. The marked characteristic of this tendency has been contempt for the teachings of tradition and experience, and a confident disposition to solve each new problem simply upon its own merits. Political action, controlled and guided by such maxims, can have but slender attraction for the educated class, whose very training implies respect for precedent, who shrink with instinctive suspicion from a sentimental apprehension of political or moral truths, and who are accustomed to value liberty simply as a means to an end. If by liberty be meant merely the removal of restraint, — the sense in which some of its most famous advocates in our time seem to understand it, — it will be long before men of sound culture can be brought to give it a very enthusiastic countenance. But by the side of this sentimental conception of political rights

there has existed another tendency which in actual practice has usurped the control of public policy. The twin gods of our political Pantheon have been Rousseau and Bentham. To these two masters all our political theories since we became an independent nation may be traced. For whatever may be thought of the utilitarian philosophy as an abstract code of morals, it has unquestionably stamped itself upon our time as a practical rule of legislation. Had this rule always been applied in the enlarged definition given it by Mill, its results might have been less deplorable; but the maxim so emphatically reiterated by the founder of the school, that government is a necessary evil, the legislator being simply a physician summoned to wrestle with a disease, worked a fatal paralysis of political opinion. The state was unclothed of all that gave it authority and majesty; politics, surrendered to mere expediency, were hopelessly divorced from the restraints of right and duty, and high sounding declarations of zeal for the general good came, too often, to cover the vulgar conflict of private and selfish interests. Here, too, so far as concerned the participation of the educated class, the same result inevitably followed. Men whose deepest solicitude was for ideal and spiritual ends, shrunk from what seemed so much a struggle for mere personal advantages.

But, without doubt, the consideration that has weighed most in chilling the interest of our educated class in politics is connected far less with the theory of our government than with its practical working. It is the wide-spread conviction that in the actual administration of such affairs as fall within its limited

range, culture, training, intellectual equipment of any kind, instead of being valued as essential conditions of efficient public service, are rather hindrances to a political career. It was the evident expectation of the framers of our system, that the working of the elective principle would result in the elimination of the best elements of the body politic; and that eminent fitness would be the recognized test for responsible position. As we are forced sadly to confess, this hope has been disappointed, and our government has come to embody, not the highest, but the average intelligence, and to hold out its highest prizes to adroit management rather than to admitted desert. That the majority of those who formed the educated class in this country when our constitution went into operation, looked with distrust upon the experiment, is a fact familiar to all students of our history; but could they have foreseen the inevitable modification which that experiment was destined to undergo, could they have foreseen how much more powerful that popular control which they so much dreaded, was destined to become, their distrust would have changed to despair; over the portal of the structure which they reared with so much pains, they would have carved the ominous warning —

“ All hope abandon, ye who enter in ! ”

And yet, if we fairly considered it, this modification was but the logical working out of the primary postulate in which our whole political system rested and if we take a just view of that system, will furnish no ground whatever for the suspicion that we have wandered from the normal path of our political develop-

ment. It is a modification that, after all, has lessened rather in appearance than in reality, the real influence of the educated class. It furnishes no ground either for indifference or discouragement; for if the visible prizes of political success lie less within their grasp, the opportunities for the exercise of a permanent and controlling influence have been in no way diminished.

Let us concede, for the argument, the utmost that the most dismal of our political Cassandras have asserted, that a representative government, under democratic rule, must inevitably conform to the level of the majority which it represents; and conceding, too, what in this whole discussion has been strangely assumed as a thing of course, that the majority in any community will always prove themselves less capable and less intelligent in the direction of affairs than the minority, it still would by no means follow that under institutions like ours an educated minority would be finally cut off from a wholesome participation in political duties. Those who reason in this way reason from precedents that do not apply to our condition, and mistake the function of government, and the significance of public offices under a system where the representative principle is allowed full play. For the gist of the complaint that educated men with us are debarred from exercising their legitimate influence in politics, for the most part means simply that they are not selected to fill public offices, and so cannot make themselves felt in the ordinary manipulations of the political machine. The complaint is well grounded, and the grievance complained of is a real grievance; yet does it have the significance which has been attributed to it? May not what has been so persistently

urged in proof of our political decline be a passing but inevitable phase of our development? But excluding other considerations that here suggest themselves, the position on which I wish to fasten your attention is simply this; — that under a strictly representative government, like our own, public functions, even when regarded from a strictly political point of view, are less significant than under systems where power is possessed, not as a trust, but as an estate, and hence that exclusion from a technical public career carries with it far less sacrifice of real influence.

The framers of our constitution were not seeking to carry out any abstract formulas; their simple aim was to set up a compact and well-articulated constitutional republic. Yet while they had in mind a system rather than a theory, and restrained public opinion by checks and guarantees, they built on rational foundations and recognized a principle the full scope of which they did not themselves, perhaps, suspect. In this recognition lay the essential originality of their contrivance, and the sole claim of their labors to mark an epoch in the history of political experiments. In the governments of the Old World, the administration was the state. The famous maxim of Louis XIV. was no empty boast, but the terse formulating of a maxim which Bossuet had elaborately vindicated as the teaching of Holy Writ. In the purely modern monarchy which the unscrupulous genius of Frederic erected upon force, the maxim was as fully recognized; and even in the mixed system which Walpole and Grenville administered, hereditary monarchy and hereditary peerage remained, in theory at least, remote from any popular control. But our system, whatever

the artificial checks it sought to interpose, rested, at last, in the explicit recognition of one single, homogeneous, sovereign power. This power lay behind the legislature, behind the executive, behind the constitution itself; for no principle can be plainer than that so strongly insisted on by Hobbes, — and which Austin has repeated after Hobbes, — that sovereign power is, in its nature, incapable of legal limitation. Resting thus, as our institutions do, both in theory and fact, on popular will, it is true of us in a sense more complete than it has been possible to affirm it of any former political society, that it is Public Opinion which rules; that all powerful judge, which, in the language of the accomplished prince who is writing so impartially the story of our great civil strife, “possesses perhaps the caprices, but not the fatal infatuation of despots.” With us government is the mere function through which the public will is made efficient, not directing that will, but created and determined by it. Washington himself most clearly recognized this principle, when, in 1793, he wrote: “I only wish, whilst I am a servant of the public, to know the will of my masters, that I may govern myself accordingly;” words of peculiar emphasis as coming from such a man. It is a commonplace remark that a leading tendency of modern civilization is to make the influence of society greater and the influence of government relatively less; but it would be a more accurate statement that government has become more the agency through which the power of society is wielded, the relation of the two being not antagonistic, but harmonious. According to this view, government should receive, not give, the impulse. That

government alone is strong which marches at the head of popular convictions. Never was the real strength of our own government so proudly demonstrated as in the dark crisis when the conspiracy against it first revealed the mighty force of the national sentiment. One reason, doubtless, why the political discussions of the past generation have lost so much of their interest, is, that they were so much concerned with the mere form under which the masking spirit hides itself, and reached so seldom the deeper sources of national life. And one of the most precious results of our late struggle has been to cure us of the habit of looking so exclusively at the mere formal constitution, and turning our gaze to those deeper conditions of national unity and strength that lie in the great providential dispositions of our history. Let us not call it a victory of the North over the South, but rather the vindication of our formal law by the great facts of our historical development. In this truer, profounder conception of the state as anterior to the most sacred and authoritative expressions of its will, we have at once the right explanation of our political system, and at the same time the most encouraging exhibition of the true sphere of the educated class. For it follows that the real governing class are not, and are not meant to be, the mere agents of administration, but those on whom rests the responsibility of creating and informing that sovereign Public Opinion, — of which, in a free community, the administration is the mere mouth-piece and attorney.

What does it matter that this Public Opinion can only make itself efficient through the action of the majority? In a government by discussion, to borrow



a favorite phrase of Mr. Bagehot, the type toward which all civilized states are tending, and of which our own presents the most perfect example, what other method could be introduced? Lord Bacon, who denounces an appeal to the majority as the worst of all tests in the decision of purely intellectual questions, admits that in politics and religion it is the safest rule. It was the voice of the majority which fixed the articles of Catholic faith at Nice, and which admitted the Bill of Rights as part of the British constitution. It is no modern device, as some would seem to think, but was recognized by the Greeks as a fundamental principle of corporate political action, which so careful a writer as the late Cornwall Lewis terms the most important improvement introduced into practical politics since the dawn of civilization. All admit that the contrivance is defective; but when the ultimate decision is made to rest, not with any single individual, but with a collective body, it is difficult to see what other arrangement could be substituted for it; and the phrase, "rule of the masses," will lose much of its repugnant meaning, if we allow it to be divested of associations which it has inherited from other ages, and from conditions of society widely differing from our own. In the old Latin proverb it is not inaptly termed *argumentum pessimi*; for a Roman populace, at least in Seneca's time, was compacted of every pernicious element. Even as the phrase is now used in most European countries, it has no meaning here; for, happily, we have no class sentenced by inexorable social distinctions to hopeless poverty and ignorance. The exceptions which a few of our larger cities furnish are not products of our

civilization. The majority with us is a majority not indeed of high culture, not always of wise discernment, not exempt from the influence of prejudice, but singularly open to new impressions, of flexible opinions, of ever-fluctuating social consequence, and never reluctant to recognize the application of a principle. It surely does not raise the great historian of Athenian democracy in our estimation when we learn that in his last days his faith in free institutions was shaken because the majority of the American people showed such tenacious fidelity to the great principles on which all free governments must rest.

In asserting so strongly that the distinctive political function of the educated class, in a community governed by discussion, is discharged less at the ballot-box, or in the technical duties of administration, than in shaping public opinion, let me not seem to argue for the release of any portion of the body politic from their personal obligations as citizens. I am not unmindful of the benefit that results from the direct participation of every educated man in politics, — the more generous direction of political action, the elevation of political discussion, the wholesome correction of political methods which his presence ought to imply. I do not mean that the educated class should dwell apart; on the contrary, I hail it as a cheering sign when the representatives of this class replace in our political machinery the mere party politician. But I am not the less persuaded that the supreme service of the educated man is rather indirect than direct, — rendered less in his limited capacity as a constituent part of the body politic than in his broad and comprehensive relations as a member of society.

I would not utter a word to detain him from the primary meeting or the political convention ; but in neither of these can his distinguishing parts be called into most efficient play. In the primary meeting he is too often surprised by a packed majority ; on the floor of the convention he finds himself thwarted by the tricks of the wily parliamentary tactician. It is only in the indirect and slower process of appealing to public opinion that the ultimate vindication of truth and justice is assured ; and it is precisely in his fitness to make this appeal that the educated man — the man educated in the ample sense in which I have defined the term — stands head and shoulders above his fellows. He is a spiritual power in the state that no factions can outwit, that no majorities can overwhelm. He makes himself felt in a sphere where the vulgar conditions of political action no longer operate, —

“ No private, but a person raised  
With strength sufficient and command from heaven.”

And how false to history their view who hold that in a democratic community, or, in other words, in a community governed by reason and discussion, such a man can be stripped of any legitimate influence ! I will not appeal to the familiar and splendid argument of antiquity, — for it may be objected that political equality then invariably had slavery as its cornerstone, — but will limit myself to modern examples. Where, let me ask, did the earliest impulses of distinctive modern civilization show themselves but in the democratic communes of the Middle Age ? The movement towards equality of classes here initiated marked the beginning of the great mediæval renaiss-

sance. What, indeed, were the famous mediæval universities, in their formal organization, but applications of that fruitful principle of corporate action which the free towns protected against the encroachments of feudalism? The venerable terms "university" and "college" are simply survivals of the far more ancient municipal fraternities. Bologna and Paris and Oxford were, in fact, free commonwealths, creations throughout of a popular impulse, memorable protests against the isolation of man from man. Macaulay has noted as an inconsistency in Milton, that while his opinions were democratic, his imagination delighted to revel amid the illusions of aristocratic society; alleging in proof the contrast between the Treatises on Prelacy and the exquisite lines on ecclesiastical architecture in *Il Penseroso*. But the instincts of the poet were right; there was no discord whatever between his reason and his taste. The most distinctive products of mediæval architecture, — those soaring spires, those tranquil fronts of fretted stone that hush the murmuring surge of the thronged market place, those

"Storied windows, richly dight,  
Casting a dim, religious light," —

all had a democratic origin. The long-drawn aisles of Chartres, of Rouen, of Amiens, of Beauvais, the vast structures in which the common people could assemble around the episcopal throne, were popular protests against monastic and baronial exclusiveness. The cloister had no longer the monopoly of art. Investigation and experiment were substituted for tradition. The pointed style of the thirteenth century, in which the architectural taste and structural skill of the mediæval builders were united in their consum-

mate perfectness, was not an ecclesiastical and aristocratic but a lay and democratic style. Its novel and surpassing forms were direct embodiments of the new aspirations throbbing in lay society. The laity alone, from their readiness to adopt rational methods, were competent to execute these surprising works. Viollet-le-Duc does not hesitate to say that the period included in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is the most instructive in the history of art, for the simple reason that it was the expression of a movement provoked by the lay spirit acting against tradition; and the lay spirit of that age was simply another name for the spirit of the free towns.

I would not depreciate the debt we owe to the ecclesiastical and the aristocratic institutions of the Middle Age. Who can forget the monastic scholar, feeding the lamp of learning through the dark night of ignorance and barbarism? Who can refuse to recognize the seeds of generous and polite sentiment hid under the rough crust of feudal society? Who of us has not felt the romantic charm of a life so removed from anything with which we come in contact in this new world? I recall the rapture of old vacation rambles by famous streams where

“A splendor falls on castle walls,  
And snowy summits old in story,”

when every thrilled sense and spell of song and legend was quickened by the companionship of one who ranked with the noblest of those whom yonder walls commemorate, but still I cannot forget that the intellectual revival of Europe received its most powerful impulse, not from the priest, nor from the noble, but from the citizen. It was from social conditions essen-

tially like our own, that modern civilization sprang, and when we are sneered at as a gigantic middle-class experiment, when we are told that the theory of equality on which our institutions rest, can result only in the dismal mediocrity of Chinese civilization, in the unbroken level of a western prairie, let us call to mind the cheering words of Schiller, that the creator of modern culture was the middle class. If the past has any lesson to teach us on this point, it is the lesson of encouragement and hope. If we have anything to learn from experience, it is, before all else, the lesson that when political institutions rest on public opinion, when the final appeal lies to the reason and intelligence of men, when above all the great majority are prepared by a widely diffused common education to entertain this appeal, to pass a judgment on the great issues continually brought before them, the educated class, the shapers and instructors of public opinion, sit on a throne of state beside which the common seat of kings seems idle pomp !

With this interpretation of the distinctive sphere of the educated class, how enlarged the scope of their influence. In its practical operation so much more moral than legal, that influence is no longer fettered by the limitations which the mere form of government imposes. For the primary relation of the educated man is not to the technical duties of the citizen, but to the whole life of the nation. His hand may seldom touch the visible cranks and levers, but he calls into action the vital forces by which the vast engine of state is kept in motion. He sweeps over a wide range of questions with which the mere politician never comes in contact. The laws may assign

-bounds to political action, but they can interpose no check to the operation of public opinion; they are but mile-stones that mark social and political progress. In a representative system the formal constitution must conform to the growth of public opinion, for this is the wisdom by which the house is builded, by which its seven pillars must be hewn out. To the bar of public opinion, the august tribunal of public reason, all questions that affect man in his relations with his fellow man may be brought. The contrast between the dreary stagnation of a despotism, and the animating stir of a free state is simply the result of the principle that a free, and above all, a representative government must be a progressive realization of ideas. Its existence is an existence of conflict and endeavor; it implies strenuous service, and imposes inexorable responsibilities. But while the form of government in a free state of necessity is plastic, yet as the life of the nation is continuous, its present action must have constant reference to its previous history. The conditions of healthy growth are violated, if, at any time, it be rudely uprooted from its own past. In what line of amendment it may wisely move, must be decided from its own traditions, and it is especially in the wise interpretation and useful application of these traditions that the influence of an educated class makes itself felt.

As thus dealing with ideas rather than with institutions, with the essential life of the nation rather than with its mere machinery of administration, the educated class in a free state renders its most inestimable service as the exponent and upholder of those spiritual forces on which society ultimately rests. And

here we touch truths of vital moment. Though the maxim of Winthrop be no longer true, in any literal application, that the civil state is reared out of the churches, yet the principal is eternally and unchangeably true, that in the deeper life of the nation, the spiritual and the temporal can never be divided. The mere government may be secular, but the state is built on everlasting moral foundations. We may do away with an established church, but we can never emancipate ourselves from the restraints and obligations of Christian civilization; they are part of our history, they are inwrought into our being, we cannot deny them without destroying our identity as a people! For in its deepest analysis, the state is a moral person; in no other way could it serve as the agent and minister of that beneficent Providence by which history is invested with a moral order, and rendered luminous with an increasing purpose. However, in common and limited transactions, we may discriminate between the spiritual and the temporal, we cannot do so when dealing with those supreme interests and relations, from which the ultimate ends of human action, and the sanctions of civil society, derive their meaning. The life of a nation, like the life of an individual, forms an indivisible whole. The soul is one, and all voluntary acts of a moral being must be spiritual acts. We cannot at one moment be spiritual beings, and at the next be released from spiritual restraints; now subject to law and now a law unto ourselves! The principle of the separation of church and state receives an unwarranted and most pernicious interpretation, when it is understood to mean, as it so often is, that religion and politics occupy two wholly distinct prov-



inces. Much, I know, has been said of the non-political character of early Christianity, but the relation of the primitive Christians to external society was exceptional; they were subjects of a state based on antagonistic beliefs, and were hemmed in on every hand with corrupt pagan institutions. But as the Gospel gradually refashioned society, this relation was changed; the church found its most efficient ally in that secular arm which had so cruelly crushed it; and religious conviction, instead of alienating men from political duties, became the most powerful spur to political action. Rothe, indeed, has argued that Christianity is essentially a political principle, and that it is the destiny of all distinctive ecclesiastical organizations to be finally absorbed into a Christian state.

Throughout the early period of our own history the only educated class were the ministers of religion. To furnish the churches with trained teachers was the main purpose for which our most venerable institutions of learning were founded. While the clergy no longer hold this exceptional rank, they still form a numerous and conspicuous part of our educated class, and so far as concerns the shaping of popular opinion, doubtless its most influential part. They touch the deepest chords of popular sentiment as no other agency does. And if it be true that the state is but the embodiment of this popular sentiment, that its action is inevitably shaped by the convictions which the great body of the people come from time to time to cherish as right and true, what duty can rest upon the pulpit more sacred and more imperative than the duty of subjecting this popular sentiment to the discipline of re-

ligious belief? Even what is termed speculative opinion cannot be set aside as unimportant, for no earnest, efficient action, no action aiming at large and beneficent results can be severed from speculative opinion. From speculative opinion all the vital movements of society take their shape. Mr. Burke, in a brilliant passage, has declared that Politics and the Pulpit have very little in common, but it was the Puritan pulpit which created the noblest type of the republican citizen.

And in this trying crisis through which we now are passing, when a cup of humiliation and shame is pressed to our lips such as we were not forced to drink in the darkest hour when treason stalked abroad, to whom shall we look to quicken our sluggish moral sense, to diffuse a more sober temper, to inspire a more genuine reverence for things that are true, honest, lovely and of good report, rather than to the ministers of religion? Who but they can educate that public will which, Sismondi tells us, "is the sum of all the wills, of all the intelligence, of all the virtue of the nation?" What voice but theirs shall bid that storm to rise which shall sweep forever away the whole abhorred crew that have swarmed like unclean birds to the seats of power, —

"conspiring to uphold their state  
By worse than hostile deeds, violating the ends  
For which our country is a name so dear?"

I cannot but think that our American Christianity has come, of late years, to concern itself too exclusively with private and social needs, and has lost the masculine hold it once had on public duties. In enforcing

